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ORIGIN INR-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 SSM-03 SIG-03
CIAE-00 NSAE-00 PM-05 DODE-00 SS-15 NSC-05 ACDA-12
IO-13 /099 R

DRAFTED BY INR/RNA/NE:AAVACCARO:MP
APPROVED BY INR/RNA:PGRIFFIN
SSM:JTMACANDREW
DESIRED DISTRIBUTION
SSM

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P 022305Z MAR 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
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TREASURY PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: EG, IS, PINR

SUBJECT: INTSUM 512 - MARCH 2, 1978

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING
PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY
OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

1. ME-ERITREA. INCREASING SOVIET-CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN ETHIOPIA'S EFFORT TO REGAIN CONTROL OVER ERITREA WILL SOON CONFRONT THE ARAB LITTORAL STATES AND ISRAEL WITH THE PROSPECT OF A GROWING (AND PROBABLY LINGERING) SOVIET-CUBAN PRESENCE FAR UP THE RED SEA. WHILE SOUTH YEMEN AND LIBYA WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO SUPPORT SOVIET AND CUBAN BACKING FOR ADDIS ABABA, THE NEGATIVE REACTIONS OF US FRIENDS IN THE ARAB WORLD WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY INTENSIFY.

2. SAUDI ALARM, ALREADY AT A HIGH LEVEL OVER EVENTS IN THE OGADEN, WILL GROW. RIYADH HAS AN AMBIVALENT ATTITUDE TOWARD THE ERITREAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT BECAUSE OF ITS RADICAL ORIENTATION AND MIXED MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN MAKEUP. HOWEVER, SAUDI PRESSURE FOR THE US TO "DO SOMETHING" TO PREVENT A SOVIET-CUBAN "TAKEOVER" OF ERITREA WILL PROBABLY GROW MORE INSISTENT. SUDANESE AND EGYPTIAN REACTIONS WILL BE EVEN MORE STRIDENT. ISRAEL BELIEVES THAT IT MUST HAVE UNHINDERED ACCESS TO EILAT. CONSEQUENTLY, IT CAN BE EXPECTED TO EXPRESS THE GRAVEST CONCERN AT THE PROSPECT OF SOVIET-CUBAN HEGEMONY THERE.

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3. EGYPT-USSR. IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS, BOTH MOSCOW AND CAIRO HAVE DROPPED HINTS ABOUT THE DESIRABILITY OF BETTER TIES BETWEEN THEM. SO FAR, HOWEVER, THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE SIGNIFICANT MOVEMENT ON THE ISSUES THAT DIVIDE THE TWO, AND MUTUAL SUSPICION REMAINS HIGH.

4. SADAT'S QUALIFIED PRAISE FOR BREZHNEV'S "STATESMANSHIP" LAST WEEK IS THE LATEST IN A SERIES OF TENTATIVE OVERTURES BY EACH SIDE TO SUGGEST INTEREST IN A LESS ACRIMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP. MORE RECENTLY "ARAB DIPLOMATIC SOURCES" WERE CITED AS STATING THAT CAIRO IS INTERESTED IN IMPROVING TIES WITH MOSCOW. SADAT'S MOTIVES FOR THE MOVE WERE SAID TO LIE IN THE ALLEGED LACK OF CHANGE IN US POLICIES FOLLOWING HIS VISIT TO THE US.

5. THIS RECENT SOVIET-EGYPTIAN FENCING HAS SO FAR PRODUCED MINIMAL TANGIBLE RESULTS. THERE IS NO SIGN OF THAW IN THE SOVIET-INSPIRED WARSAW PACT FREEZE ON ARMS SHIPMENTS TO EGYPT. ON THE ECONOMIC SIDE, MEANWHILE, SOVIET-EGYPTIAN TALKS IN CAIRO CONCERNING THE 1978 TRADE PROTOCOL DRAG ON WITH LITTLE SIGN THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS WILL

YIELD AGREEMENT ON LONGSTANDING DISPUTES OVER EGYPT'S DEBT TO THE USSR OR OTHER CONTENTIOUS ECONOMIC ISSUES. TRADE LEVELS THIS YEAR ARE EXPECTED TO BE LOWER THAN LAST, AND THERE IS STILL NO INDICATION THAT EGYPT WILL LIFT ITS EMBARGO ON COTTON YARN PRODUCTS TO THE USSR. NOR ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL HAS THERE YET BEEN ANY DISCERNIBLE LET-UP IN SOVIET PROPAGANDA CRITICISM OF SADAT'S POLICIES. BREZHNEV CRITICIZED HIM SHARPLY DURING ASSAD'S VISIT TO MOSCOW, AND THE SOVIET MEDIA ATTACKED EGYPT'S ABORTIVE CYPRUS RAID AS A "PIRATICAL ACT."

6. NEVERTHELESS, BOTH MOSCOW AND CAIRO ARE LIKELY TO FOLLOW UP ON THE LIMITED CONTACTS ALREADY IN TRAIN, AND, THOUGH MOVEMENT WILL BE SLOW, SOME LESSENING IN TENSIONS
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BETWEEN THE TWO IS A DISTINCT POSSIBILITY. FROM MOSCOW'S PERSPECTIVE, THE TIME SEEMS OPPORTUNE TO EXPLORE LESS HOSTILE RELATIONS. THE KREMLIN PROBABLY BELIEVES THAT SADAT'S FAILURE TO ACHIEVE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN HIS TALKS WITH ISRAEL AND THE US OFFERS PROSPECTS THAT HE MAY

NOW BE MORE FLEXIBLE TOWARD THE USSR.

7. MOSCOW MAY ALSO BELIEVE THAT SOME MOVEMENT IS ESSENTIAL IF SOVIET-EGYPTIAN TIES ARE NOT TO DETERIORATE EVEN FURTHER. THE SOVIETS ARE ALMOST CERTAINLY WORRIED THAT THE ONCE-POWERFUL MILITARY LEVERAGE WITH EGYPT IS BEING FURTHER ERODED BY EGYPTIAN MOVES TO ACQUIRE NON-SOVIET WEAPONRY. THE US ANNOUNCEMENT ON F-5'S WILL, OF COURSE, HAVE DEEPENED THAT CONCERN.

8. AT THE SAME TIME, MOSCOW IS STILL AWARE THAT EGYPT IS THE KEY ARAB ACTOR IN THE PEACE PROCESS. THE KREMLIN IS PROBABLY ALSO SOMEWHAT UNCOMFORTABLE WITH ITS GROWING DEPENDENCE ON SYRIA, THE PLO, AND THE REJECTIONISTS AS ITS ONLY PRESENTLY VIABLE ENTREE TO FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS. THAT FACT PROVIDES SYRIA, IN PARTICULAR, WITH CONSIDERABLE BARGAINING POWER IN ITS DEALINGS WITH MOSCOW, AND THE KREMLIN PROBABLY SEES A LIMITED OPENING TO EGYPT AS A PRUDENT COUNTERWEIGHT TO EVEN GREATER DEPENDENCE ON ASSAD AND ARAFAT.

9. FROM SADAT'S VIEWPOINT, A RENEWED DIALOGUE WITH MOSCOW ALSO OFFERS SEVERAL ADVANTAGES. HE MAY SEE EGYPT'S SOVIET CARD AS A MEANS TO NUDGE WASHINGTON ON ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS. AT THE SAME TIME, IT WOULD BE CHARACTERISTIC OF SADAT TO SEE A MOVE TOWARD MOSCOW AT THIS POINT AS HOLDING POSSIBILITIES FOR COMPLICATING
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MOSCOW'S RELATIONS WITH HIS ARAB OPPONENTS -- OFFERING
MOSCOW BETTER RELATIONS IN EXCHANGE FOR A PULL BACK IN
THE KREMLIN'S BACKING FOR THE HARDLINERS.

10. LIMITED IMPROVEMENT ON THE SOVIET FRONT MAY ALSO
REFLECT SADAT'S EFFORT TO DEFUSE RISING DOMESTIC UN-
HAPPINESS OVER THE SLOW PACE OF CURRENT TALKS. IN
ADDITION, SADAT MAY ALSO BE UNDER PRESSURE ONCE AGAIN
FROM HIS MILITARY AT LEAST TO BEGIN SOME NORMALIZATION
OF RELATIONS WITH THE USSR AS EGYPT'S SOVIET-SUPPLIED
ARSENAL CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE. (SECRET) CHRISTOPHER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SUMMARIES, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE054105
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: AAVACCARO:MP
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X2
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780096-0962
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197803113/aaaadsbe.tel
Line Count: 186
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: e9ccbab9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN INR
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3137251
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INTSUM 512 - MARCH 2, 1978 LONDON FOR KINSOLVING PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY
TAGS: PINR, EG, IS
To: SINAI
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/e9ccbab9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014